

## JOHN BUNCLE'S DROLL ACCOUNT OF A BATTLE BETWEEN A FLEA AND A LOUSE

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The Life and Adventures of John Buncele by Thomas Amory was first published in 1756 and it is supposed that the author sketched, in this book, parts of his own career. Much of it is taken up with religious, moral and contemplative circumambulations and the entomological account is one of such digressions.

Thomas Amory has been called the "English Rabelais" and although some biographical accounts persist in stating that he was of unsound mind, this belief was ably repudiated in 1822. Buncele's nativity appears to be in doubt, but he was the son of Councillor Amory, who was appointed secretary for the foreign estates in Ireland by William III. He lived at one time in Westminster and died on November 25, 1788, at the age of ninety-seven.

An interesting summary of what is known of his life together with the controversial accounts thereof has been written by Ernest A. Baker.<sup>1</sup> In the following statement John Buncele describes what he saw through a "double reflecting optical instrument."

"In the double reflecting telescope, a louse and a flea were put; which are creatures that hate each other as much as spiders do, and fight to death when they meet. The flea appeared first in the box, and as he was magnified very greatly, he looked like a locust without wings; with a roundish body, that is obtuse at the end, and the breast covered with an armature of a triangular figure; the head small in proportion to its body, but the eyes large, red, and very fierce; his six legs were long, robust and made for leaping; the antennæ short, but firm and sharp; its tail was scaly, and full of stings, and its mouth pointed into active pincers: his color was deep purple.

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<sup>1</sup> The Life and Opinions of John Buncele, Esquire, by Thomas Amory, with an Introduction by Ernest A. Baker, M.A. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co.

“The louse in white was next brought on, and had a well shaped, oblong indented body: his six legs were short, made for walking and running, and each of them armed at the extremity with two terrible claws: the head was large, and the eyes very small and black: its horns were short and jointed, and could be thrust forward with a spring. Its snout was pointed, and opened, contracted, and penetrated in a wonderful manner.

“The first that was brought on the stage was the flea, and to show us what an active one he was, he sprung and bounced at a strange rate: the velocity of his motions in leaping were astonishing; and sometimes he would tumble over and over in a wanton way: but the moment the louse appeared, he stood stock still, gathered himself up, and fixed his flashing eyes on his foe. The gallant louse did with a frown for some time behold him, and then crouching down, began very softly to move towards him, when the flea gave a leap on his enemy, and with his dangerous tail and pinching mouth began to battle with great fury; but the louse soon made him quit his hold, by hurting him with his claws and wounding him with his sharp snout. This made the flea skip to the other side of the box, and they both kept at a distance for near a minute, looking with great indignation at each other, and offering several times to advance. The louse did at last in a race, and then the flea flew at him, which produced a battle as terrible as ever was fought by two wild beasts. Every part of their bodies was in a most violent motion, and sometimes the flea was uppermost, but more frequently the louse. They did bite, and thrust, and claw one another most furiously, and the consequence of the dreadful engagement was, that the flea expired, and the louse remained victor in the box: but he was so much wounded that he could scarce walk. This battle was to me a very surprising thing, as each of them was magnified to the size of two feet; but considering what spees or atoms of animated matter they were, it was astonishing to reflection to behold the amazing mechanism of these two minute things, which appeared in their exertions during the fray. It was still more strange to see the aversion these small creatures had to each other, the passions that worked in their little breasts, and the judgment they showed in their endeavors to destroy one another.”